

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

October 29, 2007

The Honorable Gordon H. Mansfield  
Acting Secretary of Veterans Affairs  
Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue, N.W.  
Washington D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary Mansfield:

It has recently come to our attention that the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) has banned the recitation of a common flag-folding ceremony sometimes used by cemetery employees and volunteers at the 125 national cemeteries. It is our understanding that the change in policy was prompted by one complaint at Riverside National Cemetery in California.

In this particular case, someone objected to one of the many religious references in the flag-folding ceremony. We find it appalling that the change in policy may prohibit national cemetery employees and volunteers from reciting the 13 steps, and that the ban extends to Veterans Service Organizations like the American Legion and the VFW, which often provide volunteers to assume flag-folding duties and the playing of Taps at veterans' funerals.

Religion and government must interact while co-existing in society. In 1997 the Supreme Court decision *Agostini v. Felton*, identified three primary criteria for determining whether a government action has a primary effect of advancing religion: 1) government indoctrination, 2) defining the recipients of government benefits based on religion, and 3) excessive entanglement between government and religion. It is clear the 13-flag recital, if requested by the family, does not reach the threshold established by the courts.

In our opinion, the outright ban of this ceremony made to provide uniformity in military funeral services at military cemeteries is an unnecessary response. The folding of the flag is a solemn moment at a military funeral and for many families of veterans it has tremendous meaning. The very essence of a funeral is spiritual and if a family wants the 13 steps recited they should make that choice, not some bureaucrat in Washington. Our veterans deserve better.

We request that you reconsider this decision and adopt the policy that the recitation of the flag-folding ceremony shall be allowed if the family of the deceased makes the request. We feel our veterans have rightfully earned this honor if the family of the deceased so chooses.

Sincerely,

  
Ken Calvert  
Member of Congress

  
Steven C. LaTourette  
Member of Congress

George Richmond

Van Burhan

Rgt. J. Wicks

Blomfussling

John Klein

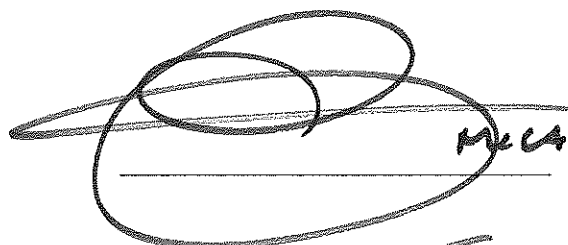
Mary Faller

Lui Canto

Buck McLean

David Olson

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Tom Salgan

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Kane Camp

Steve King

John Murrell

Mary Bond

John Bond

Paul C Brown  
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Ken McQuay

Connie Mack

Paul Galt

Jon Parker

T. K. ~~McQuay~~

W. Goddard

Omar Magallo

Ed Royce

John L. Bond

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Joe Wilson

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Bill Sali

Don McHugh

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Pete Hockin

Giff Stearns

Jim Jordan

Maxim (IL 6)

Ben Long

Pat Tiberti

Rob Long

John Hoke

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Robin Hayes

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Kennan J. Ehlers

Dir. P. Kelly

Spencer Zucker

Geoff Jarvis

Jerry Moran

Nayla Walden

Christopher Skays

Bill Shuster

Gean Schmidt

Jorge P. Hs

Louis Lehman

Quinn Hunt

John Emerich

Virginia Foxe

Ralph M. Hall

E. Whitfield

John T. Little

Dan Barton

Jerry Lewis

Joe Barton

Wayne T. Gibbrest

Gene Walker

David D. Jones

J. Saxton

Ric Keller

Chip Pickering

Walter B. Jones

W. H. Fry

Roy Begula

Jim Trinstad

Fred R. Platts

Thelma Drake

Robert B. Adenholt

Steve King

Nancy Beyer

Barry Miller

Phil Lingrey

Ch. B. Bontag, Jr.

Mike Simpson

Mark Smith

Jeff Miller

Jim Campbell

Steve Chalkey

John

Sue Myrick

Rodney Alexander

Sammy Holley

Thomas Price

Greg Lamborn

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Charles W Dent

Julia Woy

Barbara

Ginny Brown-Wait

John Culberson

Adrian Smith

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Thomas Price  
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Ing W. H.

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M. H. Ryan (AL-3)

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John Borgman

Jeff IL 19

Adrian Smith  
NY-3

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Sam Johnson AL-3

Tom Felt

Al W. Dent (PA-15)

Marilyn Musgrave Co-04

Dave Weldon

Mike Shum

Randy Munn

Bob Carter Tr3,

Kevin Brady

Kes Gray

Glenn Stankis

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